4/20/72

Dr. Ralph Abernathy
Southern Christian Leadership Conference
Atlanta, Georgia

Dear Dr. Abernathy,

I am the man whose letters you never answer. And I am the man who has written many other letters to many others at SCLC, without ever getting a direct answer. I am the man whose lawyer was told, after a delay of some months, by Mrs. King's secretary that we would hear from the family lawyer, Mr. Wachtel. With the lapse of two years, naturally there has been no time for response. I am the man who has written at least 100 black leaders, without a single response. And to the best of my knowledge, I am the only man who has undertaken to learn who killed Dr. Martin Luther King. Jr. I leave it to you, his closest friend and the closest thing he yet has to an inheritor, to put it all together.

I have had a couple of indirect responses from some of your people. Then an iron curtain would slip down in silence, and they would be silent thereafter.

But I find your tongues are not always clamped. At the wrong times they wag like those of old women who have nothing to do but gossip. I am reading Gerold Frank's defamation of the craft of writing, that obscenity to which you have loaned yourself. From Frank's representation - and taking his word is like believing it when a whore speaks of love - you have done more than lend yourself to this ultimate defamation of a great man. You have become part of it. You and your closer associates have become part of it.

For shame! Shame on you and all yours who preach the gospel and practise lies! Who makes yourself part of the biggest lie about a friend.

I have just come to a passage in Frank's book where, with the subtle skills he possesses he has treated you and the victim as children, a kind of writing that will find commercial acceptability in the white south. And then I came to a passage in which he lied for the liars of the prosecution, from St. Edgar the Indispensable down, a lie without which, to his knowledge, the rest of this commercialized lie would be impossible. Now I know that he knows this is a lie, and if he did not tell this lie he could not say there was no conspiracy. I have had two confrontations with Frank, one of his seeking and one by radio, while he is selling his filth. Another is scheduled, but I do not anticipate his presence, for I think his observation of my confrontation with Huie and the man who made the courts lie shook him considerably. That when I was on the phone and he was in the radio studio left him shaking. When I pressed him on this central evidentiary point he gave still a different lie. You have not enough interest in the murder of your friend to be interested in the fact of how he met his death or why or at whose hands. It seems to be enough for you to be part of the hawking and accepting of an entirely false version of how he met his death and how you became his successor. What a monument to a great and brave man, what a tribute to "friendship" and "love", what a self-characterization!

You may regard this as a bitter letter, perhaps even unkind. I think it is neither. It seeks to bring you face to face with much less than you should confront - you and all those who could not have been more completely silent if your order silenced them, and from the number in SCLC from whom I have heard once only the suspicion is warranted.

Aside from becoming willing accomplice in the defamation of truth, your friend and yourself, you have loaned yourself to the defamation of a brave man who is my friend, Matt Herron. Remember Gwynne Oaks, one of the earlier and more violent demonstrations? Matt was there, white man that he is, and there he went to jail? Remember the vigil against bacteriological warfare when our military was killing people of color only? Matt was there, too, for 22 months in the bitterest winter and most enervating heat of summer. Remember New Philadelphia and so many other dangerous places in the south, more dangerous for the white than for the black because they were white and helping black? There, too, Matt was, and there, brilliant photographer that is he, he sought to bring the truth to the people. There exists an eloquent picture of him escaping one of the overstuffed stormtroopers, cameras flying at his sides as he fled the upraised club. Now read page 122 of Frank's book. And to this add that when Matt went to Memphis to cover the killing, he could get no help in an effort to investigate when the trail was still warm, recollections still fresh-not from any black friend of the black victim.

If this be manhood, sir, then I would elect cowardice, for as it is described, this is less manly. Cowardice cannot possibly be a less honorable state. And if you and so many others depict friendship, then I am happier with the many enemies this work has earned me. Indeed, if this defines friend, how define enemy?

And so a great man is dead, killed for nothing, and you bear witness to it. Not for nothing and not in ignorance, for what Frank would say was printed in the newspapers before he wrote a word of his book.

I leave it to you to count the black murders encouraged by the failure to solve this one of which every black leader is part, for each, including you and without exception, abdicated his manhood as he did biblical teaching. Unless you, too, have re-translated the bible and to you turning the other cheek means turning another jugular.

You are a preacher. I preach in my own way. I bring you fire and brimstone in the hope of your salvation. If you have done nothing to earn it, may you yet find it. Would that I could say I expect it. But if you do not, for you there will be no

peace.

Harold Weisberg

P.S. When you go to bed, don't count sheep. Count instead the innocent black brothers the same prosecution has in jail in Memphis. If that doesn't do it, count those in other jails in other cities, where the prosecution has been encouraged by this kind of black brotherhood. And remember, in Memphis as so often elsewhere and specifically in this case, the usual reward of the prosecutor is judgeship.

If none of this encourages sleep, reach out for a hand. You will find it.